



DEVELOPING NATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS THROUGH MORAL EDUCATION LESSONS

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Abstract

This article examines the role of moral education lessons in developing national and intercultural competences among primary school pupils. With globalization influencing education, there is an urgent need to balance the preservation of national identity with the acquisition of intercultural skills. Using a qualitative research design, this study investigates the effectiveness of didactic tools such as storytelling, project-based learning, and classroom discussions in fostering both national awareness and respect for cultural diversity. Findings indicate that moral education lessons significantly contribute to strengthening pupils' understanding of cultural heritage while simultaneously promoting openness towards other cultures. The paper also discusses theoretical frameworks of competence development, reviews international research, and highlights pedagogical strategies that can be integrated into national curricula. Recommendations are provided for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers to systematically embed competence-based approaches in early education. The study concludes that moral education, when supported with innovative didactic methods, plays a vital role in shaping responsible, tolerant, and globally competent citizens.

Keywords: primary education; moral education; national competence; intercultural competence; didactic tools; pedagogy; global citizenship



Introduction

The 21st century has introduced unprecedented challenges and opportunities for education systems across the globe. While schools remain central to the transmission of academic knowledge, they are also tasked with preparing pupils to live and work in diverse, multicultural societies. For primary school children, moral education lessons play an essential role in this preparation, as they help shape not only cognitive skills but also values, attitudes, and behaviors that define social interaction. National competence refers to the ability of students to understand and appreciate their cultural roots, traditions, and heritage, while intercultural competence refers to their capacity to engage respectfully and effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The integration of these two competences is crucial for building citizens who are both rooted in their national identity and open to global perspectives. This paper seeks to explore how moral education lessons, supported by didactic tools, can simultaneously foster national and intercultural competences in primary school pupils.

Literature Review

A considerable body of literature highlights the significance of competence-based education in modern pedagogy. The OECD (2018) emphasizes that future-oriented education should prioritize the acquisition of key competences over rote memorization of facts. UNESCO (2015) underscores the role of global citizenship education in cultivating respect for diversity, tolerance, and peace. Scholars such as Banks (2019) and Barrett (2020) note that multicultural and intercultural education is critical for social cohesion in pluralistic societies. Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from other cultures, a skill increasingly demanded by globalization. While many studies examine multicultural curricula, fewer have specifically focused on moral education lessons in primary schools as vehicles for both national and intercultural competence development. This study addresses this gap by combining theoretical insights with practical classroom strategies.



Theoretical Framework

The development of competences in education is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment. National competence builds upon theories of identity formation (Erikson, 1968), where children develop a sense of belonging and cultural continuity. Intercultural competence, meanwhile, draws upon sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978) that stress the importance of social interaction and cultural mediation in learning. Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence suggests that attitudes such as openness and respect, combined with knowledge and skills, lead to effective and appropriate behavior in intercultural contexts. Integrating these theories provides a framework for analyzing how moral education lessons can serve as a platform for competence development in early education.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to explore the role of moral education lessons in developing competences. Participants included primary school pupils aged 7–10 years, along with their teachers. Data collection methods comprised classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, and pupil reflections through drawings and short narratives. Didactic tools used in the lessons included storytelling, interactive discussions, and project-based activities focusing on national traditions and intercultural comparisons. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns in pupils' responses and behaviors, allowing for the evaluation of both national and intercultural competence development.

Findings / Results

Findings reveal that pupils who participated in lessons integrating national and intercultural themes demonstrated a stronger sense of cultural awareness and respect for diversity. Activities such as comparing folk tales from different cultures not only engaged pupils but also encouraged critical thinking about similarities and differences among traditions. Teachers reported that pupils displayed improved cooperation, empathy, and willingness to engage with new



ideas. Moreover, didactic tools such as visual aids and storytelling enhanced pupils' ability to connect moral concepts with real-life situations, fostering both cognitive and affective dimensions of competence. The results suggest that moral education lessons, when properly designed, provide fertile ground for cultivating national and intercultural competences simultaneously.

Discussion

These findings align with existing literature highlighting the role of intercultural education in promoting tolerance and social cohesion (Barrett, 2020; Banks, 2019). However, this study contributes a unique perspective by focusing on the integration of national and intercultural competences within moral education lessons in primary schools. Unlike some studies that treat national identity and intercultural openness as separate or even opposing goals, this research demonstrates that both can be developed in parallel. By embedding national symbols, traditions, and values into lessons while also exposing pupils to intercultural comparisons, educators create a balanced approach that strengthens cultural roots without fostering exclusion. This has important implications for curriculum development and teacher training in diverse educational contexts.

Implications and Recommendations

The study highlights several practical implications. For teachers, it suggests incorporating diverse didactic tools into moral education lessons to promote engagement and learning. Curriculum developers should design materials that integrate national traditions with intercultural perspectives to ensure a balanced competence-based education. Policymakers should invest in teacher training programs that emphasize intercultural pedagogy and provide resources for developing innovative teaching methods. At a broader level, the findings suggest that moral education can be a powerful instrument for building cohesive yet diverse societies, where pupils grow into tolerant, responsible, and globally competent citizens.



Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The qualitative design limits generalizability, and the relatively small sample size restricts statistical analysis. Furthermore, the study focused on a specific cultural context, which may not reflect experiences in other regions. Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches, involving larger and more diverse populations, and explore longitudinal effects of competence-based moral education. Comparative studies across different countries could also provide a deeper understanding of how cultural context shapes competence development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, moral education lessons are crucial for the holistic development of primary school pupils. They provide an effective platform for nurturing both national and intercultural competences, equipping children to navigate the complexities of a globalized world while remaining connected to their cultural heritage. The study emphasizes the importance of using didactic tools such as storytelling, project-based learning, and interactive discussions to foster active engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Ultimately, investing in moral education contributes to the development of responsible, tolerant, and culturally aware citizens, reinforcing the vital role of education in promoting social harmony and global cooperation.

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